

Thesis/
Reports
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A VALLEY IN TRANSITION:
HUNTERS, HOMESTEADERS, AND HIKERS

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Compiled for Estes-Poudre Ranger District
Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest
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Fort Collins, CO 80524

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Spring, 1988

The Engert Homestead was destroyed during the Big Elk Fire, Summer 2002


THANKS MUCH!!

My special thanks goes to Ginny Deal, Forestry Technician from Estes Park. Ginny introduced me to Homestead Meadows and shares my love for the area. She has prodded me, encouraged me, listened to me, walked with me, photographed for me, transported me, and brainstormed with me. The history you are about to read would never have been compiled without Ginny.

Thanks much to Al and Ann Rose of Longmont, CO; Lee and Peg Nettleton Parker of Wheatland, WY; the late Lucille (Mrs. Turner) House of Paonia, CO; Wanda House Marr of Loveland, CO; Jack and Jean Seybold of Estes Park, CO; Monte House of Golden, CO; Howard and Alice Walker of Kooskia, ID; D. A. and Janie Krout of Longmont, CO for the many, many hours of memories they have shared with me.

Thanks, too, to the staff of the Estes Park Library, Longmont City Library, Denver Public Library, The Lyons Redstone Museum, Larimer County Clerk's Office in Fort Collins; to the senior citizens of Lyons; to Cindy Rivera of the Forest Service; and to countless others who have added bits and pieces of information.

For assisting in the writing of this history, I thank Glenna Delle Kimzey of Albuquerque, NM, my friend and fellow teacher from many years back.


Jo Ireland

NOTE TO THE READER . . .

As you read the following pages, please remember that this is not meant to be a complete history but is a general overview with enough detail to allow you to glimpse the quality and style of life over nearly a century in Homestead Meadows.


You may find that the actuality, in this case, does not fit your concept of "homesteading." Here there were no families who loaded all of their possessions in a covered wagon and struck out into the unknown to build a new home in a distant location. In most cases the distance between the old home and the new homestead was quite short, often less than a day's journey. And, while Homestead Meadows was somewhat isolated because of terrain, settled areas were accessible enough that the homesteaders could obtain supplies and market their products.

Please consider that the information upon which this work is based came largely from the memories of people who once lived here. Memories fade over the years. Add to this the well known fact that in a group of people, all of whom are spectators at the same event, no two of them will see exactly the same thing. Under these circumstances it is difficult, if not impossible, to produce a set of indisputable facts.

Not everyone connected with Homestead Meadows is mentioned. That does not mean that these residents were insignificant, but rather that, for many different reasons family members and friends were not readily available for interviews. Since my schedule did not allow me unlimited time for this project it was impossible for me to seek out every detail.

Dates may seem inconsistent in some cases. This is due to certain variations in the records of Larimer County, those of the State of Colorado, and those of the Bureau of Land Management, all of which were searched for the material you will find here.

I trust that the information in this survey will help you to visualize the colorful personalities of the people who inhabited Homestead Meadows and the unique quality of their lives.



Jo Ireland

PROLOGUE

A herd of forty elk grazed contentedly along spring-fed Deer Creek. They lifted their heads as wild turkey settled in the edge of the nearby forest. Mule deer curtailed their browsing in the meadow area at the top of Grizzly Gulch as a black bear ambled across the clearing. He would stop to claw "the bear tree" where many before him had stopped and many after him would also stop before going over the hills and down Lion Gulch. On Roderick Hill (Kenny Mountain) a mountain lioness watched her kits tumble playfully over each other. Overhead a golden eagle rode the air currents and disappeared over Lion Head. At dusk a half dozen coyotes and an owl joined together to serenade a full moon. They were answered by the soft rustle of quaking aspen. Yes, it had been a typically peaceful, busy day in Homestead Meadows.

The animals inhabited an isolated inaccessible valley in which there had been few incursions of man. The meadows were teeming with wildlife of many kinds but, in those early years, so was all the surrounding territory. Consequently, hunters passed by this primeval glen to the more accessible hunting grounds. Water, here, came chiefly from springs, and the small streams that did exist were too small to attract beaver. Hence no fur trappers penetrated to this idyllic spot. And so it was that this basin we call Homestead Meadows kept its state of pristine wilderness long after encircling areas had been explored, intersected by trails and settled. However, even while no changes were apparent here, events were in the making that would produce a considerable impact on the region.

All was not peaceful in the rest of the world. Those were the days of changes. Range wars often erupted between landowners over grass and

water. Conflicts between white and red men still flared occasionally. Stage coach lines were giving way to railroads. "Consumption," with a variety of remedies often worse than the malady, was common.

Those were the days when a man's word was final and dependable. Lawmen were not always called in to settle confrontations that could be handled on the spot by those involved, witnesses, or friends of victims. Trips to town were infrequent. Mail was often picked up by an individual only after he had read in a newspaper that he had mail at a given post office.

Land was available for the hardy. Rules for acquisition varied locally, but the general requirement for homesteading consisted of filing an intent, building a house within five years, spending a required number of days on the property each year, and giving evidence of a means of making a living from the land. The usual amount of land in a homestead was 160 acres.

Occasionally, in those early days, men traversed Homestead Meadows. Hunters sought the abundant wildlife. Ranchers from the south discovered the rich grass and numerous springs. Their cattle grazed the area, necessitating, at times, the presence of horseback riders to drive the herds back to their home ranches. Man's presence was only temporary, but the peaceful seclusion of the meadows was noted.

Beginning in the mid-1880's the homesteaders came and they came to stay. It was William Laycook who, on January 21, 1889, received the earliest certificate of patent. He and Charles Pullen settled on Deer Creek just above Big Elk Park. Settlement spread over the area as these pioneers were followed by Boren, Wilson, Brown, House, Engert, Smith, Walker, Hill, Irvin, and finally Griffith in 1923.^{1,2,3}

Many of the early homesteaders had already homesteaded land near Lyons or Longmont, but were lured to this peaceful secluded area by those same characteristics that lured the former visitors: abundance of game; rich, nourishing grass; more than adequate water supply from numerous springs; and potentially good timber sources for the needs of the growing population. But these people were different from those casual visitors. They came to make homes, to put something back into the land instead of merely taking from it. Their influence would be more lasting.

At first the settlers stayed only during the summer months, returning to Lyons or Longmont with their cattle and horses for the winter. Sometimes the men stayed through the winter, but wives and children returned to town for school.⁴ Hired men were often happy to spend the isolated winters here tending livestock to avoid lawmen, old sweethearts and others.⁵

The depression years of the late twenties and thirties brought about many changes in land ownership. Although most landowners continued to operate on 160 or 320 acres, Turner House began, in the late thirties, to buy parcels of land until, eventually, he owned most of the southern and eastern portions of what is now called Homestead Meadows. In the fifties declining cattle prices prompted some landowners to sell. Virginia Hill purchased almost all of the area. Robert Isbell then purchased her holdings plus a few others. Hohnholz added Isbell's holdings to the many acres he already possessed.

Residents were a hardy group, characterized by creativity, innovation, determination, and plain old hard work. Cattle ranching and timber harvesting were the main sources of income. Farming was limited to oats, hay, cow peas in the early days, potatoes, and other vegetables. Timber products included huge mine props, bridge planks, railroad ties, milled lumber, mine caps, firewood, and Christmas trees.

Income was derived from miscellaneous individual activities. Isbell and Hohnholz used the Irvin Homestead for a hunting camp, making additions and modifications to the structures.^{6,7} During World War II Peg Nettleton raised rabbits and sold the pelts to the military services for the linings of parkas.⁸ Turner House conducted his own band providing entertainment for visitors at Copeland Lake Lodge and later in Estes Park.⁵ Boren used his home as a hotel for convalescing "consumption" victims and other visitors.⁴ Potatoes were often sold or given to people outside the area.⁹ Johns marketed the peas that were the result of his experiments.¹⁰ Sarah Walker walked to town marketing eggs and perhaps cream. Part of her livelihood came from her job as off bearer at Willie Billings' sawmill.¹¹

The residents really did not have a sense of being a community. They lacked such institutions as a church or a school which tend to pull people together. Most families, especially those with younger children, left their ranches in the winter to allow their children to attend school in the valley towns.^{4,12} High schoolers rode horseback or walked to Estes Park.^{7,8} Some children were taught at home. Lucille House, a certified teacher, at one time taught neighborhood children in Sarah Walker's empty cabin. She also taught her own children at home.^{5,13} Local tradition insists that the cabin near Wilson Spring was a schoolhouse. However, long-time residents and early residents remember the cabin as the abandoned Wilson Cabin.^{4,5,12} Desks found there in recent years were probably put there for storage when the Turner House family moved from the area.¹³

Social events included Fourth of July picnics on Cabin Creek⁵ and Saturday night dances in homes large enough to accommodate such gatherings. Bill Walker, championship fiddler, and other family members often furnished the music. Dancers travelled by horseback or horse-drawn wagons to the

dances after the Saturday evening chores were done, danced all night, and returned home in time to do Sunday morning chores.¹¹

Meat on the table was often venison or elk, taken out of hunting season by unlicensed hunters. An unwritten, unspoken agreement existed between residents and game wardens that hunting for food would be overlooked as long as there was not excessive killing. In return, residents did not ask for assistance when animals ate or damaged their crops.^{5,12}

Wildlife assisted residents another way. Ranchers watched the sky for circling buzzards to help them locate a downed horse or cow.¹¹

Potatoes and other vegetables grown in gardens were supplemented by wild foods such as salad greens, raspberries, strawberries, blueberries, chokecherries, and plums.⁴

Access roads were always a source of concern because of terrain, erosion, and seclusion. Maps of the area made around 1900 show the access through Big Elk Park to the south, cutting through the corner of what is now Homestead Meadows and out to the northwest through Pierson Park. As settlement moved generally from south to north, the road through Big Elk Park was extended to connect with Grizzly Gulch. Around 1926 residents attempted to build a road down Lion Gulch but abandoned the project.¹¹ The spring runoff after the heavy snows of the winter of 1946-47 destroyed much of the road between Cabin Creek and Highway 36 near Big Elk Meadows. Again residents joined forces and with Larimer County began to build a road through Lion Gulch. County crews began at the lower end while residents began building from the upper end. Larimer County withdrew funds before the project was completed leaving a bit of road on either end and a trail between.¹⁰ As a monument to these transitory efforts at cooperation, a county road grader rests on Kenny Mountain, retired from its task of smoothing rough roads.

Much of the land was within the national forest--Medicine Bow National Forest at first later changed to Colorado National Forest and still later to Roosevelt National Forest. Forest personnel periodically designated trees to be harvested and permits for such were issued. Grazing permits were also allowed, adding many acres to the small ranches.

In 1943 Kenny Mountain was the scene of a lightning caused fire in which several acres were burned. Firefighters stood a good chance of being trapped in the blaze, but averted the danger by taking refuge in an uninhabited bear den as winds grew stronger.¹⁴

During the late thirties and forties a spruce budworm epidemic swept the area much as it has in the past few years, with a similarly devastating effect.¹⁴

All of this activity made a definite impact upon the area, but nature has a way of healing the scars that such tenure brings. The wind, the rain, the snows, and the spring thaws wreak the havoc (or is it the magic?) that, left alone will eventually level mankind's "improvements." Already, a short hundred years since the first homesteader came to this land, many of the man-made structures have collapsed, others have disappeared entirely, and the remaining ones have weathered to soft earth tones and are beginning to blend into the landscape.

The settlement here began with a single homesteader. Others joined him with their families until there was a loosely knit community. Then, gradually, for many different reasons, one family after another left the area. Sometimes their neighbors and sometimes newcomers bought the land and consolidated the holdings. The number of people living here grew smaller. Finally the number of landholders was reduced to one and the Meadows became part of a large ranch. Eventually even this tenure was

not feasible and in 1978 the Forest Service purchased the land for the people of the United States. Thus it became again the domain of the elk, deer, bear, and golden eagle.

Once again Homestead Meadows is a peaceful, though busy place alive with animals and birds. Hikers, hunters, and horseback riders traverse the area and sometimes camp temporarily. The homesteaders are gone, but quiet memories of the time they dwelt here live on.

BOREN, LAYCOOK, AND PULLEN HOMESTEADS

The first homesteader in this area, William H. Laycook, received his Certificate of Patent on January 21, 1889. His tenure was a very short one, for within months he sold the property to Margaret Pullen. Her husband, Charles Pullen, homesteaded the property immediately to the south, receiving his Certificate of Patent in 1892.^{1,2,3}

In 1899 Robert Boren, a widower, with two of his young children, came into the area along with a partner, D. H. Barber. Within a few years Barber purchased the Laycook property, Boren filed for a homestead and together they acquired the Pullen property. Boren and his family lived on the property and did the ranching while Barber lived in Greeley.⁴

The builder of the present Laycook house is unknown. Mina Boren Christner remembered living in a house on the Laycook place about the year 1900, when she was a small child. She described it as a log house with a large kitchen and living room, two bedrooms upstairs and an adjoining lean-to.

The Borens' first cabin was completed in 1901. It was made of rough slab wood and included a kitchen and living area on the ground floor and a loft for sleeping. To give the rooms a lighter, more cheerful appearance, lime was used to whitewash the interior walls. Beds consisted of feather ticks on top of straw ticks, on top of springs.

Out-of-doors bark-covered slabs or boards made a "winnie" fence around the cabin. The potato cellar behind the house provided frost free storage, not only for potatoes but for other root and vegetable crops as well as for jams and fruits.

Timothy grass hay, potatoes, and other vegetables were raised in the nearby meadow. A spring near the house, which Boren rocked up for easy access, provided water for domestic use as well as for garden crops.

Boren and his two youngest children, Mina and Joe, stayed in Lyons during the school year but returned to the ranch in summer. They were accompanied, always, by a housekeeper who, in addition to her housekeeping duties cared for the children.

Mina and Joe spent most of the summer out-of-doors. They helped the housekeeper pick wild plums, strawberries, raspberries, gooseberries, currants, and chokecherries which not only provided fruit during the summer but were preserved for the winter. They helped cultivate the wild strawberry plants so that they would provide larger crops. The children often went south to fish in Cabin Creek and enjoyed exploring the canyons there. A boat on the lake (Lake Pasture on current Forest maps) was a source of great enjoyment and that, along with horseback riding, provided many happy summer days for them.

When the children were a bit older, the family stayed on the ranch the year round. Winters were hard with wood to chop, cattle and horses to feed, springs to keep open, water to carry, snow-filled paths to out-buildings to shovel. Food was adequate. They depended upon such things as cabbage and various root crops grown during the summer and stored in the root cellar. Meat was usually venison and was plentiful. Then there were the ubiquitous potatoes, grown in great quantity and tasting better, it has been said, than any other potatoes grown anywhere else!

Evenings were spent in the cozy warmth provided by wood cut last summer. The family played Dominoes or other games or gathered around the organ to sing. Diversions were few but well-remembered, such as the time they ran out of supplies and Mr. Boren had to snowshoe out to replenish them.

To provide income from his ranch Boren ran cattle, cut hay and timber, and sold potatoes in Lyons. As he went to Estes Park and Lyons for supplies, he met travelers coming to the high, dry climate for relief of tuberculosis and other respiratory ailments. Remembering his wife's constant poor health, he would sometimes invite one or two travelers to stay at his ranch. This prompted him to build a large two-story log house with dining room, living room, and kitchen downstairs and six bedrooms upstairs. This practice of providing rooms for visitors continued for several years even after a fire, caused by the wood stove, leveled the "hotel" in December, 1914. Only the foundation remains of the hotel. The family then returned to the "original house"* which had been converted to a hay barn. Modifications were made to make it more liveable.

Boren lived alone on the ranch after the marriage of his children and the death of a second wife.

In 1925, D. H. Barber and Roy Christner, Boren's son-in-law acquired the property. In September of the same year it became the sole property of Christners. They did not use the land, but rented it out for several years. In 1930 it was purchased by E. J. Johnson and within the month it came into the hands of a public trustee.

Christner was known in the area for his participation in a project that was of great local interest. In 1913-14 Enos Mills and others had arranged to have some elk shipped in from Yellowstone to be placed in the mountains near Estes Park. Christner was among the men who unloaded the animals from a train in Lyons and put them on wagons to be transported to the area that was to become Rocky Mountain National Park. ⁴

*The series of homes is a bit confusing. The 1901 homestead cabin was built on the hillside to the northwest of the "hotel." The existing house was built after the family left the area.

In 1933 the property was deeded to H. F. Springer who, in 1937 encouraged William Turner House to purchase it. (Turner was the son of Bob and Nettie Engert House. They had homesteaded at the base of Twin Sisters in 1907, outside the periphery of Homestead Meadows. Both lived in the area all their lives. House was a cattle rancher and sawmill operator. It was for him House Rock was named.)

At first the House family lived in the very southeast corner of the Pullen property in a two-story house with kitchen and living room downstairs and two bedrooms upstairs. Nothing remains of the house today--neither rubble nor foundation. Outbuildings included the bunkhouse, chicken house, barns and sheds with corrals, root cellar with ice house behind it, and a small building which housed the cream separator, the presence of which would suggest that a different source of income had appeared in Homestead Meadows--the sale of some dairy products. House soon built a log playhouse for his young daughter adjacent to the house.

The family moved to the Laycook property in 1940. Within the next few years many physical changes were made to the ranch. An addition to the back of the house increased living space. Daughter Nona and son-in-law Clarence utilized a small bunkhouse.

Other additions included an intricate corral system, built so that cattle could drink from Deer Creek as it passed through the pens, a pond, a log barn and a sawmill.⁵

Using a horse-drawn slip, House built a dam across Deer Creek. Above the dam he hollowed out a basin to form a pond. The pond not only allowed livestock to drink freely, but was a source of enjoyment for the family. House and his son-in-law stocked the pond with fish. They loaded two empty

55-gallon oil drums in the back of the pickup and went to Boulder for the fish. On the return trip up Highway 36, in tourist traffic, the men had to take turns riding in the back of the pickup and aerateing the water on the fish by pouring the water from one barrel to the other and back again. Can you imagine the effect this action had on the tourists sharing the road? Nevertheless, the children enjoyed fishing in the pond. Son Monte found half an oil drum in which, like "the three men in the tub," he sailed "the mighty sea many times."

The children's time was not all spent in playing. Monte and a nephew, Larry, accompanied Mrs. House to the Sarah Walker cabin for school with the Hutchinson children. Later they were taught at home. Other duties included ranch chores and herding cattle on horseback.

Logs from the second story of the Boren house were used to build a barn adjacent to the corrals. House intended to dismantle the lower story and reconstruct it at the Laycook site. He carefully measured the structure and laid the foundation in preparation for the move. A later inspection of the logs convinced him the move would not be practical and he abandoned the idea.

Instead he built a new house between the old house and the barn. It was complete with two bedrooms, kitchen, living room, and bathroom with modern plumbing and electricity furnished by a generator. (The small building housing the cream separator at the Pullen place had been moved to the Laycook site. The cream separator was now replaced by the generator.)

Several springs existed near the house. The earliest source of water for the house was a spring to the south. As a lad, Monte discovered a German Brown trout swimming in the spring. When he excitedly shared this discovery with his father, Turner told him he had placed the fish there much earlier to keep the water free of insects.¹³

In his early days on the ranch, House planted cow peas (the planter remains at the Pullen site) on a plot of ground. The next year he would plant cow peas on a different plot and oats or potatoes in the first plot. As he rotated the crops he maintained and built the nutrients in the soil. Oats grew as high as the horses' backs, giving evidence of the richness of the soil.

As had been true of the earlier tenants of the area, the House family raised most of the food that they ate, either fresh from the garden or taken from the root cellar in winter. Fish from the pond were a welcome addition to the menu. Turner House often supplied the table with poached venison as did most of the ranchers, in their homes. On one occasion he had a carcass hanging in the timber near the house when he saw a timber crew approaching. This crew moved through the forest marking trees to be cut. Hurriedly House moved the deer carcass to a new location. It was common knowledge that the ranchers killed deer for food, but it was best not to be too obvious about it. Later the timber crew approached the house from a different direction, near the new location of his deer. He moved it again, hoping they would not see it. After several moves to avoid observation, he thought he was safe until one of the crew came to the door and asked, "Mr. House, just how many deer do you have hanging in the trees around here?"⁵

Many tons of hay were stacked each summer for winter food for the livestock. Methods of stacking varied. Sometimes one or two men tossed pitchforksful of hay to the top of the stack where another person placed it so that the stack was solid and even. Eventually House used a horse-drawn mechanical sling-type process whereby a whole wagon load of hay was lifted at once and dumped on the stack. Next came the stationary hay

baler using a crew of people and special equipment. Hay was cut with a sickle mower, winnowed with a dump or sulky rake, and then hauled to a spot near the baler by a buck rake. (Various parts of this machinery remain at the Laycook site.) Hay was then pitched into the baler. Later an Allis Chalmers mobile baler fashioned round bales lighter in weight than the previous bales. These were not only easier to handle, but made less waste when fed to the livestock.

House's horse-drawn potato digger sits on a hillside near the Boren house. It was constructed so that the potatoes jostled their way up from the ground and back along a track, knocking all dirt from them. Two people, usually the children, picked the potatoes from the back of the implement and put them in buckets or sacks so they could be transported to the root cellar for winter consumption.¹³

Turner House followed his father's example and operated a sawmill. He sold a tremendous amount of firewood in Estes Park; some milled lumber; and many, many bridge planks for Boulder County roads. At the time he left Homestead Meadows the pile of sawdust north of the barn was nearly twenty feet high but the healing forces of nature have long-since destroyed all signs that it ever existed.¹³

The remnants of the sawmill and its surrounding piles of sawdust have largely disintegrated, but most of the things that Turner House did in his long tenancy in Homestead Meadows had more lasting results. Each of the people who came and went in the valley contributed in his or her own way to the development of the area, and each was important. However, due to the fact that he lived there longer than anyone else, Turner House produced a greater impact on the region than did others. He spent most of his life in Homestead Meadows or its peripheral areas. His long acquaintance with the land and his deep interest in its development and

preservation gave him the insight to put more back into the land than he took from it and to leave it better than he found it.

House added other small ranches to his property and sold all of it to Jack and Pearl Coffee in 1952. When they left, the "new" house was dismantled and reconstructed in the Allenspark area, leaving only the foundation.¹⁵ That was the end of an era and the beginning of another. By that time (1955) Virginia Hill had accumulated nearly all of what is now Homestead Meadows. Ownership passed to Robert Isbell in 1957 and to Hohnholz in 1960, and to the United States Forest Service in 1978.^{1,2,3}

IRVIN HOMESTEAD

Frank Irvin received the final Certificate of Patent for 320 acres in 1917. He died a short time later, passing ownership to his widow Mary in 1919. In the years that followed this property changed ownership many times. Otto Friedrichs came into possession of it in 1923; Kirkegaard in 1925; Grace Walker in 1929; Henning in 1930; Kingston Morris in 1930; R. J. Nettleton in 1936; F. A. Davies in 1948; E. A. and Kathleen Davies in 1951; Robert Isbell in 1959; Hohnholz in 1960; and United States Forest Service in 1978.^{1,2,3}

Early residents on this property were heavily engaged in timbering. Perhaps the most colorful in this respect was R. J. Nettleton. He was a man who was short in stature and long in determination. He had been a supplier of coal and firewood in Estes Park since before 1931.

After moving to the Irvin Homestead, Nettleton often accepted contracts for over-sized and odd-sized wood products that other sawmill operators avoided. At times the products were so long and so heavy that when they were loaded as usual they caused the truck to tip backwards on the hills. But Nettleton was ingenious and not easily discouraged by a bit of adversity. He built a large bin on the front of the truck and when he had a load of extra long, heavy timbers to transport he filled the bin with rocks, thus providing a counter-balance for his load. In this way he was able to handle the awkward cargo.⁸

The big logs for the over-sized timbers that Nettleton produced were skidded to the mill by a team of huge black Percheron horses. These beautiful animals were the talk of the neighborhood and no doubt were his pride and joy. Even so, when he built his barn, he built it on a scale

more suited to his own size than that of his horses. The loft floor was so low that the horses, one of which weighed 1975 pounds, could not fully lift their heads beneath it.¹⁰

As was true of most of the residents, he raised enough hay, oats, potatoes, and other vegetables to feed his family and his animals.

His daughter Peg raised rabbits in the hutches at the end of the chicken house and, during World War II, sold the pelts for linings in military parkas. She was a high school student at the time and rode a horse to school in Estes Park.⁸

The remains of a sawmill still exist north of the barn in the edge of the forest, although telltale piles of sawdust have decomposed long ago.

Later owners (perhaps Isbell and certainly Hohnholz) used the homestead for a hunting camp, leasing it out to hunters for as much as \$1000 per hunter.^{6,7} During this period rather novel additions were made to the buildings. A spring near the main house provided water to a central bathhouse by gravity flow. A rather intricate system heated the water which then flowed to a sunken bath tub. An outhouse near the main house is surrounded by vertical poles forming a "stockade." It is complete with storage room and window. Another outhouse in the edge of the forest near the bunkhouses is unusual with its three holes. Usually only two were required to accommodate all comers.⁶

This homestead site in the meadow is one of the highest in elevation and affords a spectacular view of the Mummy Range to the north and Elk Ridge to the northeast.

HILL HOMESTEAD

Clayton Hill filed for his homestead in 1916 and received the final Certificate of Patent in 1921. In March of that year the property was sold to Daisy Baber.^{1,2,3} The Baber family is more closely associated with Big Elk Meadows, to the south and east of Homestead Meadows. Miss Baber authored two books, Injun Summer, and The Longest Rope, a biography of Bill Walker.⁵

Ownership passed to James A. MacAllister in 1933, to Lyons Credit Company in 1936, and to Charles R. Davis in 1942.^{1,2,3} Davis and his son, Hal, had lived and timbered in the area for some years before their move to this property.

Each timber crew had a specialty, such as bridge plank, firewood, mine props, or milled lumber. The Davis specialty was caps for mine props. These caps were "shims" to be wedged between horizontal and vertical props so that the props would fit tightly and remain secure. The debris scattered about the home site and along the "skid" road, where logs were skidded downhill to their mill, still provides visible evidence of these activities.¹⁰

Deer Creek flows past the house. Although the stream is very shallow, Davis contrived several make-shift structures for crossing it without getting the feet wet. Several of his stopgap bridges and stepping-stones remain in place today.

Turner House, who lived on the Laycook Homestead, pastured his milk cows in the open meadows on the Davis property. One of his son Monte's chores was to find the cows and drive them home for the evening milking. Davis, sitting by the window of the cabin with the smoke from

his pipe curling over his head would inform the boy about the daily wandering of the cows. Judging by the direction of the tinkling cowbells throughout the day he could determine the location of the herd. Monte then knew where to look for the cattle and could finish this chore more quickly than would otherwise have been possible.¹³

In 1954 Virginia Hill added this property to her holdings as she did most of Homestead Meadows. Ownership transferred to Isbell in 1957, to Hohnholz in 1960, and to the United States Forest Service in 1978.^{1,2,3}

GRIFFITH RANCH

William A. Griffith purchased his tract from the State of Colorado in 1923. This parcel is in Section 16, which was removed from the public domain and became State land through a grant in 1876. State lands are often leased, and sometimes sold at public auction to generate revenue for schools. For this reason State Sections 16 and 36 in each township are sometimes referred to as school sections. The Larimer County ownership records show that this parcel was sold at public auction to H. F. Springer in 1938, a couple of years after Griffith's sudden death.¹⁶ Claude and Mabel Harrison purchased it later that year and sold it to Roy and Inez Johns in 1941. Other owners were E. A. Davies, 1949; E. A. Davies and Kathleen Davies, 1954; Robert Isbell, 1959; Hohnholz, 1960; and the United States Forest Service, 1978.^{1,2,3}

During his tenure on this property Roy Johns experimented with garden vegetables, raising and marketing an improved variety of peas.¹⁰

Little is known about the activities of the other residents of this ranch.

SMITH HOMESTEAD

Griffin Smith filed for patent in 1916 and received the final Certificate of Patent in 1922 after homesteading other parcels in the Elk Ridge and Elk Park areas and between Lyons and Longmont.^{1,2,3} The remains of his cabin are in a narrow open park in Grizzly Gulch. Smith moved to Lyons in 1927 and died suddenly at his home in 1928. He was unmarried and had no relatives in this section of the country.¹⁷

The land has remained in private ownership and is currently part of the Hohnholz Estate. It is doubtful that anyone lived there after Smith because later residents of, and visitors to, Homestead Meadows do not remember that the cabin was occupied.¹⁸

ENGERT HOMESTEAD

Charles Engert, Postmaster of Lyons, CO, filed for the Certificate of Patent in 1916 and received it in 1921.^{1,2,3} Mrs. Engert undertook the responsibility of spending, on the claim, the number of days necessary for "proving up" on the land. She would ride out in a horse-drawn buggy with her daughter, Nettie (Mrs. Bob House), who lived nearby, and spend the time alone on the property. Two sons-in-law, Bob House and Willie Billings (husband of daughter Eugenia), operated sawmills there and on other property in the area. A third daughter, Legora, homesteaded north of Homestead Meadows. Later she married Granny May, a well-known area lawman.⁶

Bob and Nettie House lived on the Engert place at one time, as well as on other properties on the periphery of Homestead Meadows. Their own ranch was homesteaded at the base of Twin Sisters in 1907. Over a period of years they lived on the Robinson Place (now Smithermans' Elk Park Ranch), in Johnny Park, and in Lyons.¹²

It was true then, as it is now, that weather could cripple all efforts to conduct one's business or to carry out the most carefully calculated plans. Bob House, dubbed "Mayor of Big Elk Park," is quoted in the April 10, 1947, issue of the Lyons Recorder as follows:

Not since the winter of 1921-22 have I seen anything like the past winter in the mountains. For over six weeks we have been unable to reach our sawmill, although we bucked snow and cleared roads constantly. Successive storms and drifting closed the roads as fast as we could open them up.¹⁹

Winter storms had begun on the weekend before Election Day, November, 1946. (No record of the amount of snow in Homestead Meadows is

available, but 33 inches fell in Estes Park in 56 hours.)²⁰ Spring run-off washed out the access road to Highway 36 near Big Elk Meadows. Because of that, an ill-fated road, down Lion Gulch, was begun but never finished.¹⁰

The Engert Family used their cabin for a vacation spot and did not engage in ranching.⁶ The property was sold to their grandson, William Turner House in 1937 and became a part of his growing ranch and timber operation.

Jack and Pearl Coffee purchased all of Turner House's property in 1952. Virginia Hill purchased it in 1955, Isbell in 1957, and Hohnholz in 1960. Most of this parcel was purchased by the United States Forest Service in 1978, with the 80 acres in the eastern end going to the Forest Service in 1982, through a land exchange.^{1,2,3}

WALKER HOMESTEAD

Sarah Walker, her husband, and two children left England seeking a better life than the impoverished ones they had known there. After living for a time in Nolan, a quarry town near Lyons, they moved to Lyons in 1908. All family members preceded her in death.

A friend has described Mrs. Walker as "almost a caricature of what we think of as an indomitable Englishwoman. She had a strong will, high standards, and an English working class sense of class distinction."¹¹ These characteristics spurred Mrs. Walker to build her life as a homesteader. She homesteaded at the top of Lion Gulch receiving her final Certificate of Patent in 1914. An additional piece of property was acquired in 1921 which includes the beautiful meadow area known as Walker Flats.^{1,2,3}

A milk cow, the calves it produced, some chickens, and a garden supplied most of Mrs. Walker's needs. Not having a horse, she walked down Lion Gulch carrying the products she had to sell, hoping for a ride into town. The return trip carrying supplies was accomplished in the same manner.

Over a period of time, Mrs. Walker cooked in Boulder, Estes Park, and Lyons restaurants and resorts to support herself. Additionally she worked as off bearer at Willie Billings' sawmill to earn enough lumber to build a new house in Lyons.

The homestead cabin built of rough lumber had three rooms: kitchen, living room, and bedroom. A front porch make the cabin complete. A spring below the house furnished water for her and her animals.¹¹ Foundations and a bit of rubble are all that remain today.

Bears, deer, coyotes, and many kinds of birds were the most commonly seen wildlife. Elk had become sparse, having been heavily hunted by visiting hunters in the Estes Park Area.

A road down Lion Gulch past the Walker Homestead was begun about 1926 by area residents including Willie Billings, Lawrence Purdue, Otis Walker, Billy Griffith and others. The idea was abandoned because of limited funds, however. Had it been completed, it would have shortened the road to town by several miles and more hours, making quite a difference with horses and wagons.¹¹

A second attempt to build a road down Lion Gulch was equally unsuccessful in 1947. Area residents joined forces with Larimer County road crews after the southern access near Big Elk Meadows and Highway 36 was washed out by the spring run-off of melted snow. Larimer County withdrew funds before the project was completed. Consequently, a bit of road exists on either end with a trail between.¹⁰

Edwin Bonay purchased the property after Mrs. Walker moved to Lyons. Bonay added chickens to his ranching enterprise.⁵

Ownership passed to Sheldon James in 1941 and to William Turner House later in 1941. His wife, Lucille, a certified teacher, taught the neighborhood children in the Walker cabin in the late 1940's^{5,13} prior to selling the property to Jack Coffee in 1952. In 1955 it was added to Virginia Hill's holdings along with several other parcels of land. It was then sold to Isbell in 1957, to Hohnholz in 1960, and finally to the United States Forest Service in 1978.^{1,2,3}

BROWN HOMESTEAD

Cloyd Brown's original filing for homestead with the Bureau of Land Management in 1908 was cancelled and refiled in 1913, with the final Certificate of Patent received in 1918. His brother Harry received the Certificate of Patent on the adjacent property in 1917.^{1,2,3} Family records indicate that Harry may have lived in the area above Grizzly Gulch for several years before he or his brother filed. As a young bachelor, Harry loved the solitude that he found in Homestead Meadows, and he loved to hunt. His rifle, probably a Winchester Model 94 .25-.35 lever action repeater, provided game meat for the table often over the years. As he tramped through the meadows in search of game or just enjoying the remoteness of the territory, he became familiar with it and realized its potential for cattle ranching and timber harvesting. However, after his marriage his life-style changed. His bride did not share his love for the wilderness and solitude of the ranch, so he built a house on the east side of what is now U. S. Highway 36. In this less isolated home, located near the bottom of Grizzly Gulch, his two daughters were born. The family lived here, but the ranch above remained Harry's joy and retreat for many years.

Daughters Imogene and Janie loved to accompany their father to the ranch, sharing the adventure of riding on loads of mine props and railroad ties as he hauled them down Grizzly Gulch and on to the valley.

Horseback riding was a main source of enjoyment for these two as it was for most children on the ranches. Each had a pony.

Janie remembers a family trip to the ranch to pick wild raspberries. She was riding along on her pony, carrying her bucket of raspberries very

carefully so that she wouldn't spill them. Then, for some reason, as her father opened a gate her horse was startled. He spooked and off he went with Janie aboard, holding on tightly but strewing raspberries along the way. In the ensuing wild ride Janie was unhurt but she finished it with some loss of aplomb and an empty bucket.

The family lived on the ranch below until the daughters were of school age. Then, in 1926 they moved to the grandparents' house in Lyons. At the ranch Brown continued to harvest railroad ties and mine props for the coal mines near Erie. His cattle herd grew in number, improved in quality, and became increasingly in demand as breeding stock. These outstanding Herefords carried the brand that Harry registered with the Colorado Brand Commission in May, 1906, for a fee of \$1.50. When the depression came cattle prices dropped alarmingly. Bulls that should have brought \$5000 each could not be sold for \$500 on the market. There was no way that Brown could maintain his herd in the face of such losses, so, sadly he sold his cattle in 1933. He continued living in Lyons where he worked as Town Clerk.

Eventually Cloyd moved to California, leaving Harry access to his acres of good grazing land and timber.

Brown's original cabin burned shortly after it was built. He replaced it with the main part of the existing structure. After the couple moved to the lower ranch, several tenants lived in the cabin. One, or more, made the additions that are visible today.¹⁸

Among the tenants were C. R. Davis and his son Hal, timber men, who eventually bought the Hill Homestead farther south in Homestead Meadows.¹⁰

In the mid-forties Al Rose became the next owner of the land. Rose became familiar with and fond of the area as a very small boy when, in the twenties and early thirties, his grandfather who worked from a ranch to the

south, grazed cattle in Homestead Meadows. It was only natural that he would return there to live, with his wife, Ann, and his two daughters. Rose ran cattle on his ranch and worked with Turner House processing timber. His cattle brand is prominently displayed on the interior walls of the cabin along with other historical records of residents such as snow depths, number of railroad ties hacked and sold, and family names. Rose piped water into the house from the nearby year round spring. Al and Ann have continued to live on other ranches in the area.¹⁰

Following the Rose family came the Frank Loring Hutchinson family. Hutchinson often sat on the hillside above the spring observing the activity below. It must have been there that he conceived the idea for his book, Secret of Hidden Valley. He wrote about the landmarks that can be identified, still, in and around the Homestead Meadows area and about the legend of the bull elk, no doubt inspired by a huge white bull, very old, that was often seen in those days by area residents. Monte House remembers his dad or brother-in-law shooting a 1200-pound bull elk standing close to the old bull, that "looked like a calf beside him."¹³

Hutchinson, like most of the people who lived and worked in the area, was involved with timber products, but his activity in this trade seems to have been limited to the sale of Christmas trees.⁸

After the Hutchinsons left in 1953 the Brown Ranch became part of the land holdings of Virginia Hill in 1954. Later owners were Robert Isbell and George Rampley, 1957; Robert Isbell, 1957; Hohnholz, 1960; and the United States Forest Service in 1978.^{1,2,3}

This homestead is of particular interest because Brown's ownership of some forty years is the longest retention period for any of the original homesteaders within Homestead Meadows.

EPILOGUE

Many people came and went in Homestead Meadows during its century of settlement. They were an interesting and diverse group. Each one left his or her impact in some way upon the life there, and some of them exerted an influence that went far beyond the confines of the area. Boren had his "hotel" which brought in outsiders for brief periods of time and added a different dimension to life in the valley. R. J. Nettleton, with his huge black Percherons and his inventive genius added color to the local stories as well as economic prosperity to the community. His daughter Peg raised rabbits which provided fur linings for Army parkas during World War II and kept ears warm as far away as Alaska. Harry Brown developed his herd of fine cattle and built a reputation that extended far beyond his community. Roy Johns experimented with garden peas, developed an improved variety, and distributed the product beyond the boundaries of Homestead Meadows. Frank Loring Hutchinson sat on his hillside observing the activities in the valley, allowed his imagination to adapt, and wrote a book to be read far and wide.

Of all the people who came and went, however, the single individual who had the longest-lasting influence on the development of the valley was William Turner House. There were others who owned land for longer periods of time than he did, but they did not live there continuously. Turner House lived in Homestead Meadows or in its peripheral areas for longer than anyone else. Some who came there took from the land whatever it had to give them, timber, game, grazing for livestock, but gave back little or nothing in return. House was a forward-looking man who enriched

the land and the quality of life for those who lived upon it. He set up a plan for the rotation of crops which increased fertility, developed available water sources, built a dam which formed a pond for storing water and for recreation, then increased the value of the pond by stocking it with fish. He built a new residence in which he installed a generator to provide electricity, and a bathroom with modern plumbing. He improved existing springs to provide a dependable water supply. He introduced modern farm machinery, a potato digger, a hay baler, and a mechanical hay stacker. His wife Lucille taught their children and some of the neighbors' children in a school which provided the only formal education that was ever available in the valley. But the most important thing about his tenure was that he stayed there and was consistent in his concern for the area and for maintaining the integrity of Homestead Meadows.

Now the valley basks in the bright summer sun or sleeps under winter snows. The transition from wilderness, through a century of settlement, and back to wilderness, is complete.

FOOTNOTES

¹Bureau of Land Management. Master Title Plots. Colorado State Office, Denver, CO. (variable dates)

²Bureau of Land Management. Historical Indices to Patent Records. Colorado State Office, Denver, CO (variable dates)

³Larimer County Courthouse. Records maintained by the Assessor's Office and Clerk and Recorder Office. Ft. Collins, CO. (variable dates)

⁴George-Nichols, Nancy. Memories of a Homesteader. September, 1983.

⁵House, Lucille (Mrs. Turner). Oral Interview with Jo Ireland. April 24, 1986; May 27, 1987; August 24, 1987.

⁶May, Legora. An Interview with Legora May (transcript). August 7, 1979.

⁷Seybold, Jack and Jean. Oral Interview with Jo Ireland. January 22, 1988.

⁸Parker, Lee and Peg. Oral Interview with Jo Ireland. October 11, 1986.

⁹Lyons Recorder. September 17, 1918.

¹⁰Rose, Al and Ann. Oral Interviews with Jo Ireland. Various dates from November, 1985, through February, 1988.

¹¹Walker, Howard and Alice. Letter to Jo Ireland. May 6, 1988.

¹²Marr, Wanda House. Oral Interview with Jo Ireland. October 23, 1986.

¹³House, Monte. Oral Interview with Jo Ireland. February 25, 1988.

¹⁴Estes Park Trail. April 28, 1944.

¹⁵Marr, Wanda House. An Oral Interview (transcript): The House (Bob) Homestead. June 10, 1984.

¹⁶Estes Park Trail. June 19, 1936.

¹⁷Estes Park Trail. May 18, 1928.

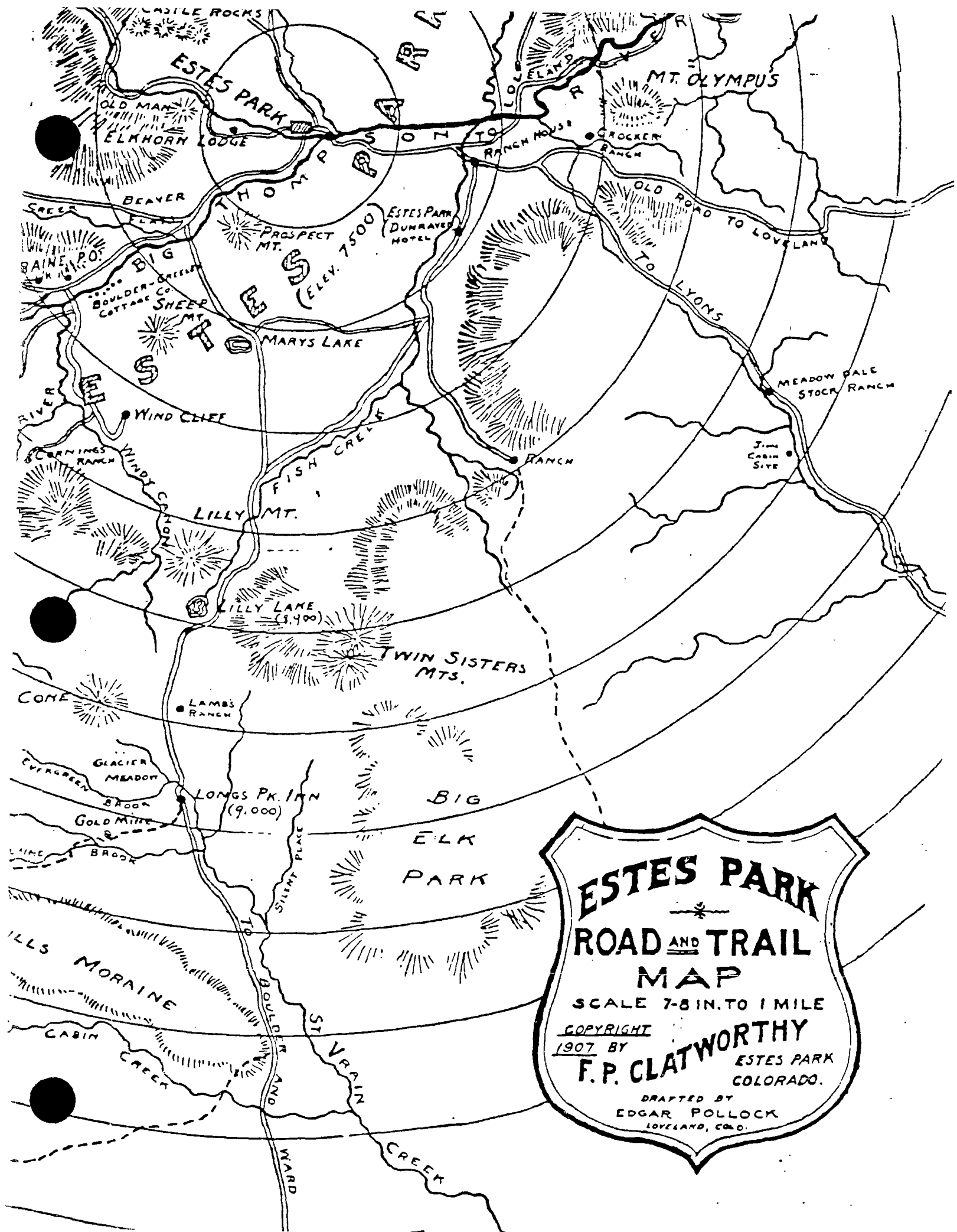
¹⁸Krout, D. A. and Mary Jane. Oral Interview with Jo Ireland. February 29, 1988.

¹⁹Lyons Recorder. April 10, 1947.

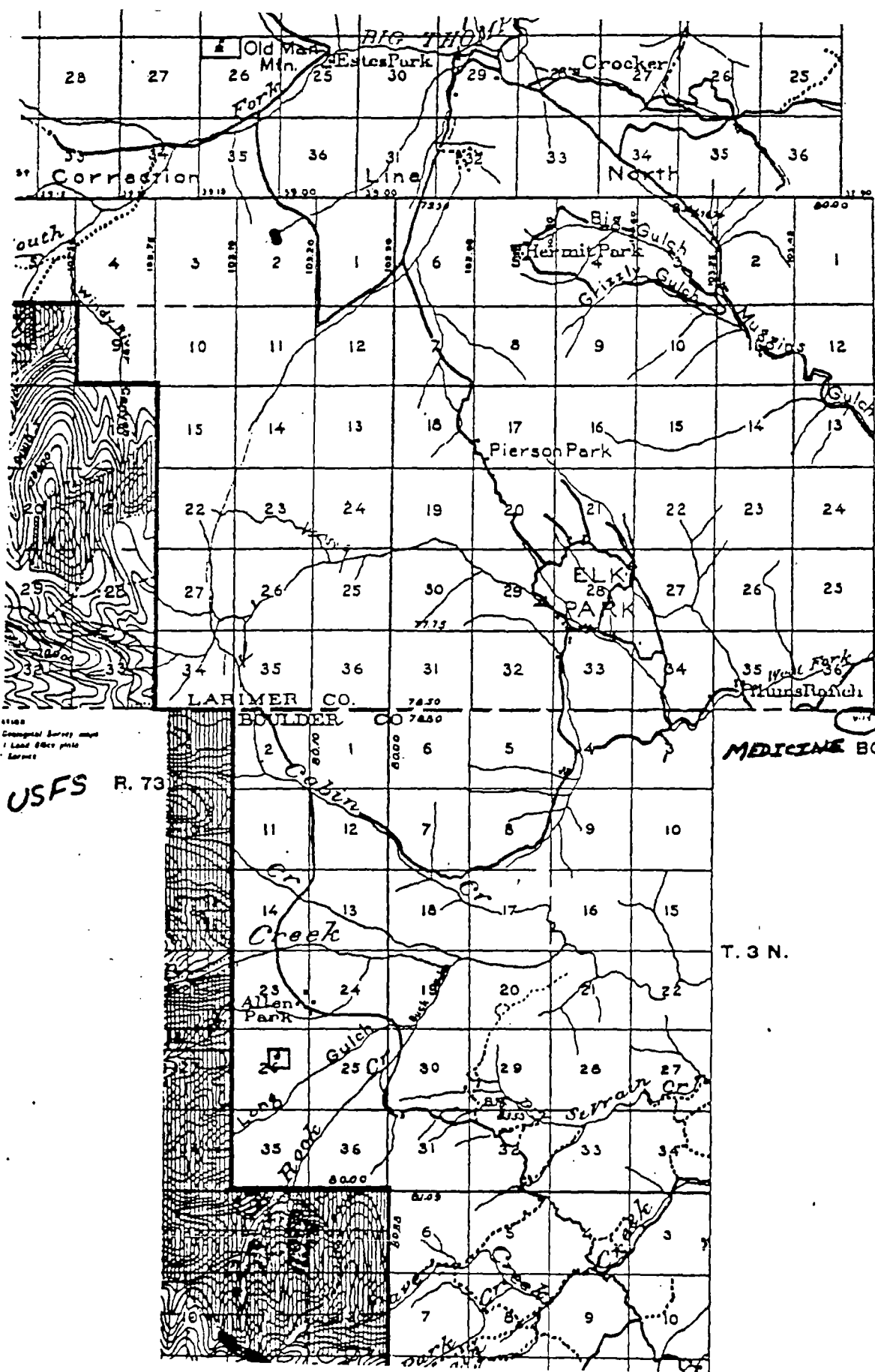
²⁰Estes Park Trail. November 8, 1946.

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- Seybold, Jack and Jean. Oral Interview. January 22, 1988.
- Times-Call. (Longmont) 1910-1925.
- Walker, Howard and Alice. Letter. May 6, 1988.



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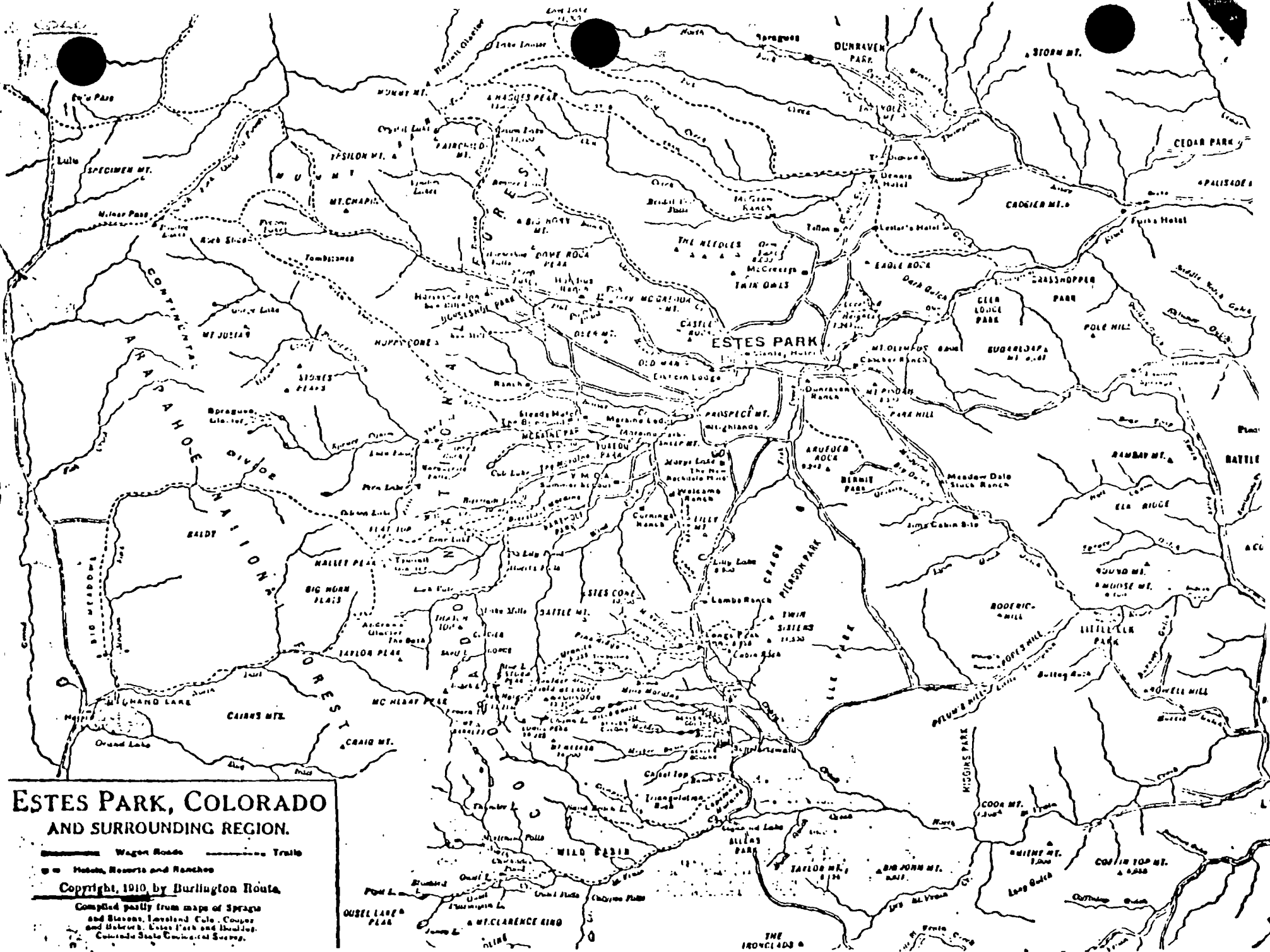


11100
Contour Survey map
1 inch = 1 mile
Scale

USFS R. 73

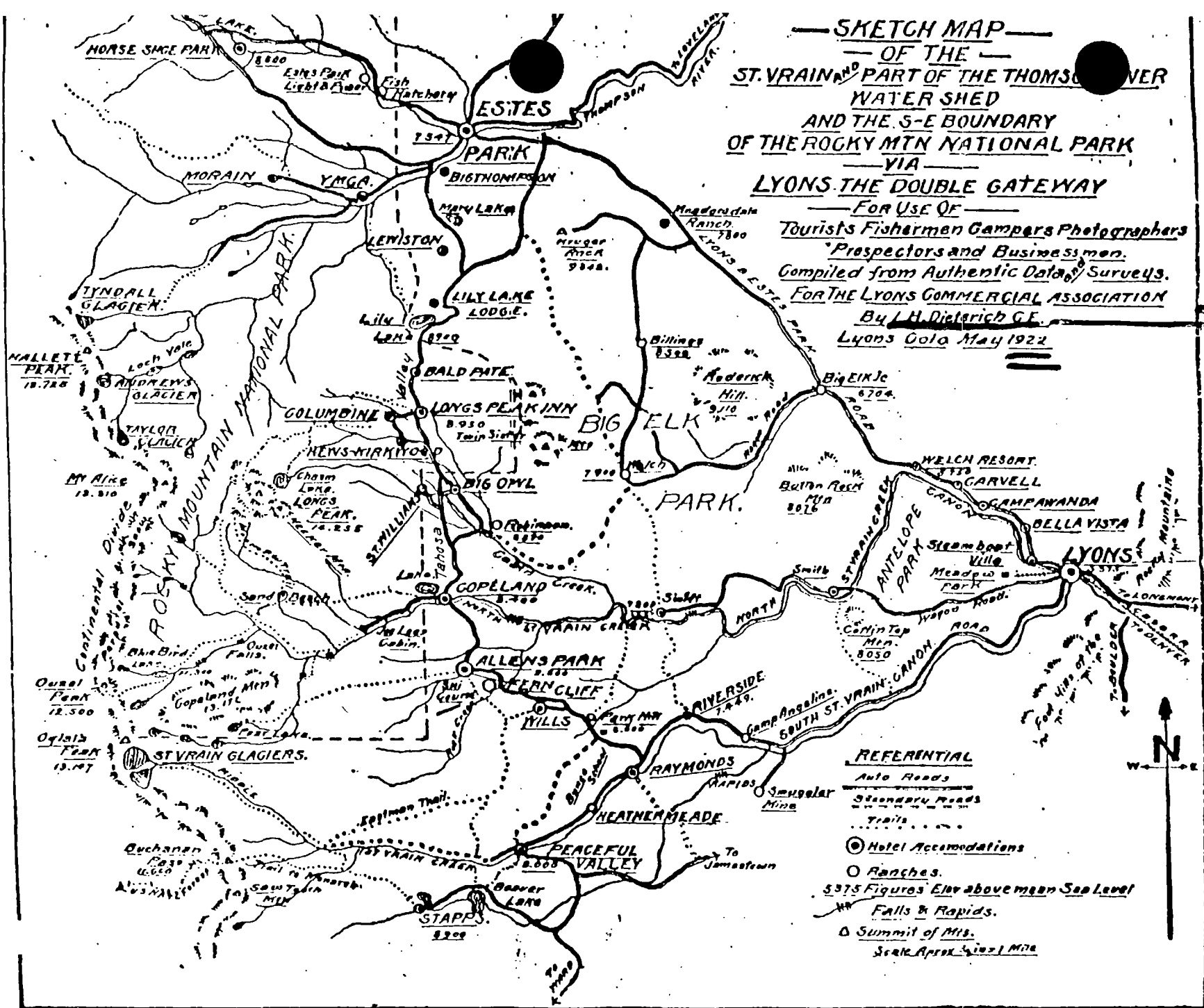
1908
MEDICINE BOW

T. 3 N.



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